

Surrogate Warfare: The Role of U.S. Army Special Forces

A Monograph

by

MAJ Isaac J. Peltier

U.S. Army



**School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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MAJ Isaac J. Peltier

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Approved by:

Richard D. Newton, MMAS

Monograph Director

Kevin C.M. Benson, COL, AR

Director,
School of Advanced
Military Studies

Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

Director,
Graduate Degree
Programs

Abstract

Surrogate Warfare: The Role of U.S. Army Special Forces by MAJ Isaac J. Peltier, U.S. Army,
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United States Army Special Forces (SF) has played a critical role in prosecuting the Global War on Terror. Their ability to wage unconventional warfare remains their trademark. Operations in Afghanistan and northern Iraq demonstrated SF's ability to successfully leverage a surrogate force to achieve U.S. objectives. These UW campaigns were unique in many ways and suggest what future unconventional warfare operations in the Global War on Terror may look like. However, this was not guerilla warfare characterized by small units using hit and run tactics. This was positional warfare in which cities were taken, ground was held, and the enemy capitulated or defeated. The Northern Alliance and Kurdish Peshmerga functioned as surrogate armies in place of U.S. conventional forces and they were controlled by U.S. Army Special Forces.

The U.S. Army has a long history of using surrogates to achieve their objectives, however, nowhere in joint and army doctrine is surrogate warfare mentioned. The primary question this monograph seeks to answer is what is required of U.S. Army Special Forces to conduct surrogate warfare in the future? Analysis of the two most recent UW campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq suggest that cultural awareness and regional expertise are critical to conducting surrogate warfare, as well as the ability to function as an operational-level joint headquarters capable of planning and supporting a UW campaign. Analysis reveals that while SF is adept at applying their cultural expertise across different cultures and regions, they need to invest more in their language and cultural awareness training to more effectively meet the challenges of the future. Further analysis also reveals that while the 5th and 10th Special Forces Groups (SFG) successfully performed the mission of a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), it was not without great growing pains. Although there is currently a wealth of institutional knowledge within the SFG with respect to operating a JSOTF, there is still a requirement to ensure timely integration and training of joint and coalition partners.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) saw the United States Army employ Special Forces (SF) on a scale not seen since the Vietnam War.¹ Since 11 September 2001, U.S. Army Special Forces have experienced a renaissance with unconventional warfare (UW), the role for which SF was originally founded in June 1952.² In his 12 March 2002 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, General Charles R. Holland, Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command, stated that the "long-standing SOF mission" of surrogate warfare was receiving deserved new attention.³ In fact, according to General Holland, U.S. strategic objectives in Afghanistan would not have been achieved if not for surrogate warfare.⁴ Interestingly, however, surrogate warfare is not mentioned in Joint or Army doctrine. This raises the primary research question for this monograph, what does SF need to do to prepare for future surrogate warfare? This monograph will argue that surrogate warfare is indeed a form of unconventional warfare and that U.S. Army Special Forces are clearly the force of choice for conducting it because of their cultural and regional expertise.

The attacks of September 11th, 2001, demanded a swift response. President Bush made it clear in his address to the nation that the U.S. would hunt down those responsible and hold them accountable.⁵ Intelligence suggested that Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda were operating out of Afghanistan, which meant the military task fell to Central Command (CENTCOM), because it was in its geographic area of responsibility (AOR). In deciding how to respond militarily, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and CENTCOM Commander General Tommy

¹ Jim Garamone, "Iraqi Freedom Largest Special Ops Effort Since Vietnam," *American Forces Press Service*, online at www.defenselink.mil/news/articles. Accessed on 27 August 2004.

² Major Mike Skinner, "The Renaissance of Unconventional Warfare as an SF Mission" *Special Warfare* (Winter, 2002), 16.

³ General Charles R. Holland, *Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee on the state of Special Operations Forces*, (United States Senate, 2002), 12.

⁴ Ibid.

Franks were keenly aware of the failure of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and did not want to repeat that failure. They agreed that the force would have to be small, flexible, and possess the capabilities to operate with precision and lethality.⁶ CENTCOM directed its Special Operations Command (SOCCENT) to begin planning. SOCCENT in turn notified the 5th Special Forces Group to begin preparations to conduct UW in Afghanistan.

Operation Enduring Freedom saw SF take an unprecedented role as the main effort in the campaign to overthrow the Taliban and root out al-Qaeda. The unconventional war fought in Afghanistan involved working by, with, and through the Northern Alliance to achieve strategic, operational and tactical objectives. The Northern Alliance, under the advisement and direction of SF, served as a surrogate army in place of the large conventional U.S. force that Rumsfeld and Franks wanted to avoid using. SF's success in Afghanistan would foreshadow what was to come a year later in Iraq.

In Operation Iraqi Freedom, SF was employed on an even larger scale. When the 4th Infantry Division was not allowed to enter northern Iraq through Turkey, the 10th Special Forces Group was used to open up a second front with surrogate forces. Kurdish militia, which numbered approximately 70,000, were used by SF to disrupt 13 Iraqi divisions, preventing them from interfering with the Combined Forces Land Component Command's (CFLCC) march on Baghdad.

In both OEF and OIF, U.S. Army Special Forces demonstrated they could leverage a surrogate force to achieve U.S. objectives. The use of surrogates in Afghanistan allowed the Bush administration to achieve the quick response desired after the attacks of September 11th. The use of surrogates also reduced U.S. presence, gave the local population a stake in the coalition's objectives, and bolstered the perception of legitimacy for a U.S.-led coalition. In

⁵ George Bush, *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*, online at www.whitehouse.gov. Accessed on 1 October 2004.

⁶ Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 271.

northern Iraq, the use of surrogates served to fill the large void created by Turkey's refusal to allow U.S. forces to enter Iraq through their country and proved to be a suitable substitute for the large U.S. conventional force that was originally planned for the northern front.

IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE

Since its inception in 1952, SF's niche has been UW. The recent experience of OEF and OIF validates this. Nevertheless, the unconventional warfare campaigns SF conducted in Afghanistan and northern Iraq were unique. This was not guerilla warfare characterized by small units using hit and run tactics. This was positional warfare in which cities were taken, ground was held, and the enemy capitulated or defeated. The Northern Alliance and Kurdish Peshmerga functioned as surrogate armies in place of U.S. conventional forces and they were controlled by U.S. Army Special Forces. The success SF achieved in Afghanistan and northern Iraq has established a trademark for UW in the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

In answering the primary research question of what is required of U.S. Army Special Forces to prepare for surrogate warfare in the future; this monograph will examine history, theory and doctrine. Analysis of the U.S. Army's use of Indian scouts on the western frontier and OSS Detachment 101's use of Kachin tribesmen in Burma during World War II will demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of using surrogate forces. The theories of T.E. Lawrence and Sun Tzu will provide an understanding of the importance of understanding culture and of knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses, as well as the value of the indirect approach to waging war. Analysis of current unconventional warfare doctrine will offer insight to how surrogate warfare might fit into the overall UW framework.

This monograph will also examine two historical vignettes from the recent UW operations in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The first historical

vignette will examine Task Force Dagger in Afghanistan and the UW operations they conducted with Northern Alliance Forces. The second historical vignette will examine Task Force Viking in northern Iraq and the UW operations they conducted with Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

Two criteria will be used to analyze and evaluate the historical vignettes presented in this monograph. The first criterion is training, and focuses on the cultural awareness and regional expertise required to conduct surrogate warfare. Analysis will reveal the challenges SF faced in working with surrogates and the steps they took to overcome these challenges. Analysis will also reveal that SF is indeed the force of choice for conducting surrogate warfare because they possess regional specialization and language capabilities.

The second criterion is organization, and focuses on the ability of a Special Forces Group to serve as an operational level headquarters capable of conducting an unconventional warfare campaign. Analysis will reveal the challenges both the 5th and 10th Special Forces Groups faced and the steps they took to overcome personnel, logistics, and planning issues.

CHAPTER TWO: Understanding Surrogate Warfare

HISTORY

The use of surrogate forces by the U.S. Army is not a new concept. One need only look to the Indian Wars of the western frontier where Indians were used by the U.S. Army to fight other Indians. The Indians had a long tradition of serving the U.S. Army as guides, but in 1866 the War Department authorized the use of up to 1,000 Indians to be officially commissioned as scouts.⁷ General George Crook was one of the main proponents of using Indian scouts. In his efforts to track down renegade Indian bands, he employed Indian scouts alongside his regular troops, but he also employed them independently. Crook understood the nature of the war against Indians was different from conventional warfare, and the only way he could be successful was by using Indians himself.⁸

Using Indians as a surrogate force to achieve their objectives, the U.S. Army was able to adapt to the environment in which they were operating. By embracing the very characteristics of the Indian that had once confounded them, the Army was able to compensate for their own weakness by leveraging the strengths of another. Besides the obvious advantages that Indian scouts brought to the U.S. Army, such as knowledge of the land and cultural nuances of the Indians, they also provided significant human intelligence. Army officers used Indians as informants by having them find out the intentions of renegade Indians through their normal interactions on the reservations.⁹ This intelligence combined with the tracking expertise of the scouts provided the U.S. Army a tremendous advantage in stamping out Indian resistance on the frontier.

⁷ Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 69.

⁸ Fort Huachuca Museums, *Apache Scouts: A Guide to Understanding History at Fort Huachuca* (Fort Huachuca: U.S. Army Intelligence Center), 2.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

Not everyone in the Army was in favor of using Indians as scouts, however. Many officers felt Indians could never be fully trusted and that their interests were not consistent with those of the Army. For example, the Apaches had a deep-rooted hatred for the Mexicans, and during Pershing's punitive expedition against Pancho Villa this hatred surfaced.¹⁰ Army officers were forced to keep a close eye on their Indian scouts to ensure they did not commit acts of brutality or cruelty against innocent Mexicans. This challenge of working with surrogates would surface again in both OEF and OIF, when Special Forces soldiers would witness acts of retribution committed against the Taliban and Ansar-al-Islam.

Perhaps the organization that has contributed most to modern unconventional warfare was the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the operational predecessor of Special Forces.¹¹ The OSS is most famous for the Jedburgh teams that infiltrated into occupied France to organize the French resistance in preparation for D-Day. However, in the jungles of Burma the OSS also conducted UW, and it was there that they experimented with the art of working with indigenous surrogate forces.

Detachment 101 was formed on 14 April 1942, for the purpose of conducting unconventional warfare against the Japanese in China and Burma.¹² Their tasks included espionage, sabotage, guerilla warfare, propaganda, and escape and evasion. American OSS operatives knew they could not pass themselves off as natives in Burma. This severely restricted their ability to conduct operations deep behind enemy lines, as the Jedburghs had done in Europe. Additionally, there were never more than 120 Americans in the field in Burma at a time. Consequently, Burmese nationals were recruited to perform these tasks, thereby becoming surrogates for the Americans.

¹⁰ Ibid.,8.

¹¹ Aaron Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces* (California: Presidio Press, 1986), 206.

¹² James R. Ward, *The Activities of Detachment 101 of the OSS (1942-1945)*, online at www.osss-101.com/history. Accessed 2 October 2004.

When Detachment 101 was formed, the Army did not have any doctrine or guidance on recruiting, training and employing native forces. The leaders in Detachment 101 figured it out as they went along. Members of the Detachment also received training from the natives. The Kachin tribesmen were fierce fighters who lived in the hills and they trained their American advisors how to survive and fight in the jungles. As Detachment 101 evolved and the surrogate army grew, they began to rely more and more on airborne operations. They began infiltration via parachute, rather than overland travel, and they learned how to conduct resupply operations by air in the jungle. They also began developing tactics, techniques and procedures for conducting rescue operations for downed aircrew. By the beginning of 1944, Detachment 101 had grown to 3,000 men and by 1945 they would be over 10,000 strong.

Detachment 101 and their Kachin tribesmen had many important roles in the war. They provided valuable intelligence to conventional American and Allied forces and they served as a vital economy of force effort in the theater. Detachment 101 was responsible for killing 5,428 Japanese soldiers, wounding an estimated 10,000 and capturing 78 prisoners. Detachment 101 losses were only 27 American and 338 natives killed.¹³ The American use of surrogates in Burma was a huge success and proved equally successful in Afghanistan and Iraq.

THEORY

The ideas of Sun Tzu, the Chinese philosopher, warrior and military theorist, are of great value in arriving at an understanding of the nature of surrogate warfare. Sun Tzu's ideas are simple and to the point, and at times seem blatantly obvious. Their enduring value though, cannot be understated as he has had a wide range of influence from Mao Tse Tung to corporate America.

¹³ Gary M. Jones and Christopher Tone, "Unconventional Warfare: Core Purpose of Special Forces," *Special Warfare* (Summer 1999), 5.

For the sake of brevity this paper will examine only one of Sun Tzu's maxims, which is of particular interest to understanding the nature of surrogate warfare. Sun Tzu said, "know the enemy and know yourself; and in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."¹⁴ Perhaps this idea, more than any other, captures the essence of surrogate warfare. There is, however, more to this maxim than meets the eye because it consists of five circumstances that will be examined in turn. The first circumstance of which Sun Tzu writes is, "He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious." The old Clint Eastwood saying, "A man's got to know his limitations," comes to mind here. Because surrogate warfare involves conducting operations with a force of varying degrees of capability, it is imperative that the sponsoring force be aware of when it is feasible to conduct combat operations. If operations are executed too soon or without the proper training or assets in place, then failure is likely.

Sun Tzu's second circumstance says, "He who understands how to use both large and small forces will be victorious." While SF is adept at conducting small unit operations, surrogate warfare may involve conducting operations with a large force. Therefore, it is important to have a thorough understanding of brigade and division level tactics, as well as small unit tactics.

The third circumstance of which Sun Tzu writes is, "He whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious." Because the interests of a surrogate force may differ from those of the sponsor, SF serves to bridge this gap by facilitating unity of effort. Perhaps the greatest strength of Special Forces is their ability to win hearts and minds through interpersonal relationships. It is through these relationships that SF is able to get surrogate forces to work towards a common goal.

Sun Tzu's fourth circumstance is, "He who is prudent and lies in wait for an enemy who is not, will be victorious." Although it may not be desirable to literally lie in wait for the enemy,

¹⁴ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War: Translated and with an introduction by Samuel B. Griffith* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.

SF can maximize the success of surrogate operations by recognizing when the enemy is not being prudent and encouraging their surrogate force to take advantage of it.

The final circumstance Sun Tzu writes is, "He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious." One could argue that Special Forces are given a great deal of latitude in how they conduct a mission as compared to conventional military forces. This is especially important in conducting surrogate warfare because SF must adapt to the environment in which they are working in order to leverage the surrogate force.

With respect to surrogate warfare, perhaps no military theorist proves more insightful than T.E. Lawrence. In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence recounts his time spent as a British liaison officer from 1917-1918 in support of the Arab Revolt led by the Emir Feisal. Prior to becoming a liaison officer, Lawrence had been an intelligence officer in Cairo where he became an expert in the Arab nationalist movement. His knowledge of the Arabs and his empathy for the Arab struggle against Turkish imperial rule allowed him to gain the trust and confidence of Emir Feisal. Subsequently, he was able to influence the Arabs to conduct operations to help British forces under the command of General Allenby to defeat the Turks.

Lawrence formed his theory of unconventional warfare to address the unique circumstances of tribal Bedouins fighting against a modern army. Lawrence began by identifying the Arab aim of war as being geographical in nature. For Arabs, success was measured by how much land they controlled, not the number of enemy they killed. To achieve this aim, Lawrence realized that the Arabs would have to leverage their strengths against their enemy's weaknesses. Lawrence identified the Turkish Army's weakness as a shortage of supplies. The Arabs, on the other hand, possessed mobility with their camels and could strike with impunity from the desert against Turkish lines of communication. Based on this, Lawrence came to the conclusion that it was foolish for the Arabs to attack the Turkish Army, which outnumbered and out-gunned them, but rather they should attack the railroads and bridges that the Turks depended upon so heavily for resupply.

It is essential to understand the importance of culture to understand Lawrence's theory of unconventional warfare. Lawrence was keenly aware of the importance of family in Arab culture, their allegiance to clan and tribe, and the role blood feud played in settling disputes. Unlike the Turks, the Arabs valued their people very much and a single death had significant impact on the whole. Thus, Lawrence developed a theory for fighting a war of detachment where the Arabs would avoid direct engagement with the Turkish Army and would concentrate instead on attacking their lines of communication. By doing this, Lawrence reasoned, he could exploit Turkish weakness while at the same time avoiding Arab casualties.

Just as Lawrence capitalized on the strengths and weaknesses of the Arabs, so, too, did U.S. Army Special Forces with their surrogates in Afghanistan and Iraq. Lawrence was able to enable his surrogates to achieve theirs' as well as British goals because he was intimately familiar with Arab culture. Regional focus and language training allows U.S. Army Special Forces to attain similar success. Lawrence possessed immense knowledge of military history, theory and doctrine. This knowledge helped him to develop his UW theories and to effectively leverage his Bedouin surrogates. U.S. Army Special Forces have been described as "PhD's with guns." SF understands the importance of continually studying their region, language, and the culture of the people with whom they work. It is through a process of life-long learning that SF is able to achieve cross-cultural expertise that allows them to achieve U.S. objectives through unconventional means.

DOCTRINE

Current Joint and Army doctrine addresses the use of surrogates in the context of unconventional warfare, but nowhere does it address surrogate warfare as a separate form of warfare. FM 3-05.20, *Special Forces Operations*, defines unconventional warfare as "a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, predominantly conducted through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying

degrees by an external source.¹⁵ In this definition, the surrogate force or indigenous force serves as the action element used to conduct unconventional warfare. Current Army doctrine defines a surrogate as a substitute, or one that takes the place of or acts for another and it defines indigenous as being native or intrinsic to an area or region.¹⁶ Current doctrine further classifies indigenous forces as either insurgents or partisans where the former fights against a constituted government and the latter against an occupying power.¹⁷

Current doctrine tends to lump surrogates into the category of coalition forces. By operating as part of a coalition, the U.S. can garner international support and legitimize U.S. military operations. It is from this point of view that coalition forces are viewed as surrogates acting as substitutes for U.S. forces, and thereby reducing US commitment. According to doctrine, coalitions "consist of standing or rapidly formed conventional forces."¹⁸ Doctrine does not, however, address irregular forces or militias and their potential use as surrogates.

With respect to conventional operations, current doctrine says that unconventional warfare can be used to either augment or reduce U.S. forces required to achieve operational and strategic objectives. Interestingly, doctrine says the way to do this is by developing and sustaining surrogate forces and synchronizing their activities with the U.S. and their allies. Again, the term surrogate is used in a different context that is not consistent with the previous definition. Clearly there is a need to accurately define what a surrogate force means and the warfare conducted by surrogates. But, before this can be done it is necessary to further examine unconventional warfare doctrine.

To gain a better understanding of how surrogate warfare might fit into the doctrinal framework of UW, it is useful to examine the seven “classic” phases of UW as put forth in current doctrine. The figure below comes from FM 3-05.201, *Special Forces Unconventional*

¹⁵ Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.20: Special Forces Operations* (Washington DC, 2001), 2-1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2-5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2-5.

Warfare Operations, and lays out each of the seven phases of UW. Normally it takes months to plan and execute a UW campaign. However, the phases do not necessarily have to be conducted sequentially, some may be conducted concurrently or not at all, and not all phases are given the same level of effort.¹⁹ All UW campaigns are unique, as the OEF and OIF historical vignettes will show later in this paper.

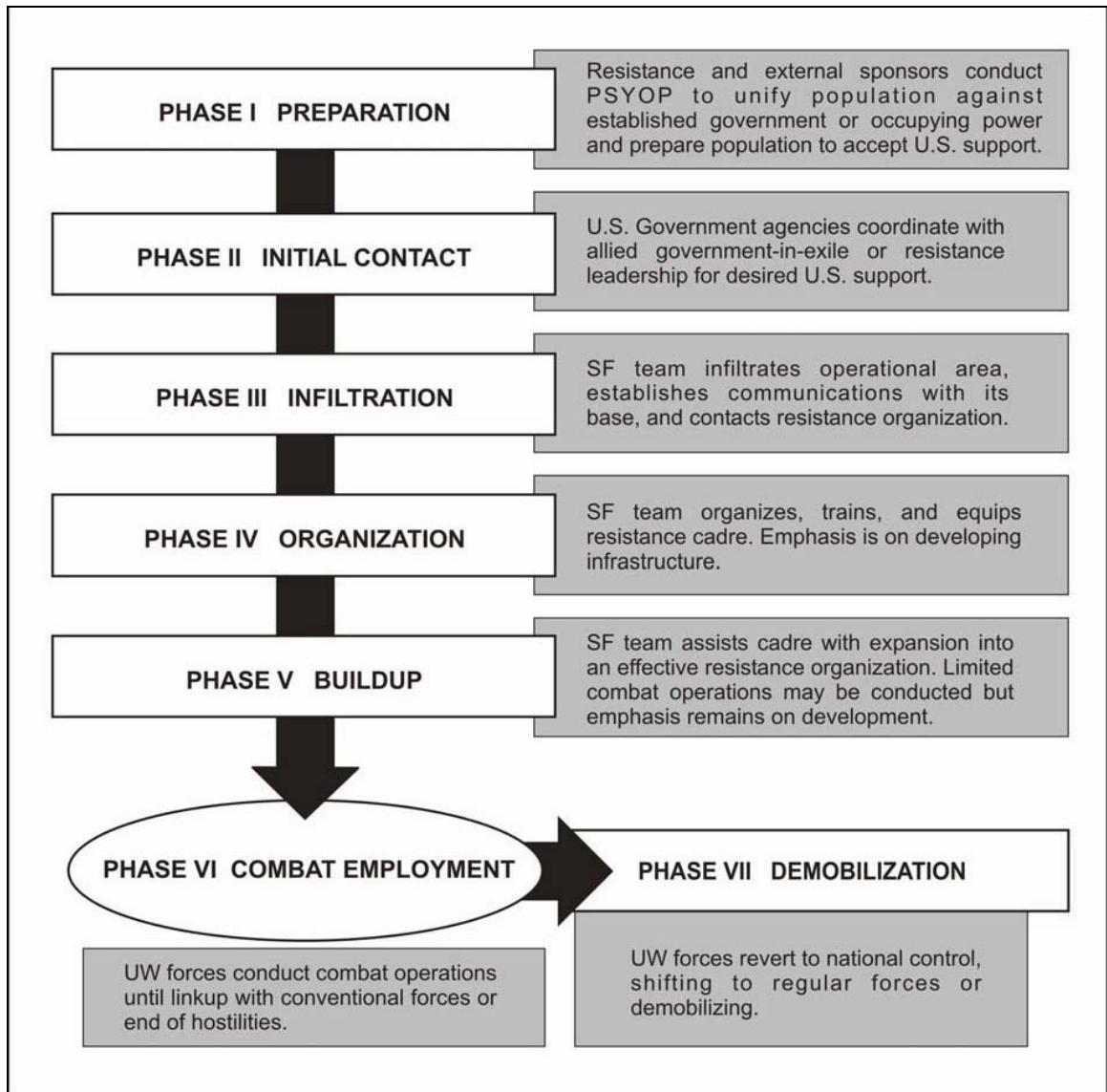


Figure 1. Seven Phases to a U.S.-Sponsored Insurgency

¹⁸ Ibid., 2-6.

DEFINING SURROGATE WARFARE

In his paper *Implications of Surrogate Warfare*, Major Allan E. Day, USAF, offers one possible definition of surrogate warfare. According to Day, “surrogate warfare is a major operation involving an ad hoc relationship between a nation-state and a surrogate force when that force takes the place of a joint force component.” Day caveats this definition by specifying that a surrogate force is only “indigenous and non-national.”²⁰ One could argue that this definition, while on its own is quite good, the conditions he applies to the definition are somewhat restrictive. A surrogate force does not necessarily have to be indigenous, nor does it have to be non-national. Rather, any force, regardless of whether it is indigenous to an area or not, that conducts an operation on behalf of another is probably a more accurate definition of a surrogate. Obviously, there are many advantages to having a surrogate force that is indigenous to a region. They have inherent knowledge of the terrain, people and culture. They also may lend legitimacy to the operation because they are not viewed as outsiders.

In his essay *Surrogate Armies: Redefining the Ground Force*, Brian L. Thompson defines a surrogate army as “a military arm that is integrated into the joint force requirements, but is not specifically a part of the joint force.”²¹ He contends that surrogate armies provide the President and Secretary of Defense a force option if they choose not to use a U.S. military force. The problem with this definition is that sometimes using a surrogate force is the only option available. For the purposes of this paper a surrogate force is defined as any force that acts on behalf of another and surrogate warfare is any operation that involves using a surrogate force as the primary means to accomplish the mission.

¹⁹ Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.201: Special Forces Unconventional Warfare Operations* (Washington DC, 2001), 1-12.

²⁰ Major Allen E. Day, USAF, *Implications of Surrogate Warfare* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2002), 4.

²¹ Brian L. Thompson, *Surrogate Armies: Redefining the Ground Force* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2002), 1.

CHAPTER THREE: Task Force Dagger – Afghanistan

Once the decision was made to go to war with Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks were not going to occupy Afghanistan with a large army.²² The Soviet's had occupied Afghanistan from 1979-1989 and their 625,000-man army became embroiled in a difficult and costly counterinsurgency.

While the Department of Defense was figuring out how it was going to come up with a military response to 9/11, the CIA had a plan to conduct a covert operation to overthrow the Taliban. Prior to 9/11 the CIA had been conducting operations in Afghanistan and had established contacts with various Afghan factions. The CIA's plan was to insert paramilitary teams into Afghanistan, link-up with anti-Taliban factions and secure their allegiance with millions of dollars and the promise of technology and firepower forthcoming.²³

CENTCOM did not have an on-the-shelf plan for Afghanistan.²⁴ Initial planning efforts indicated that a conventional military response would take months to implement. Rumsfeld was not satisfied and demanded an unconventional approach to solving the problem and he wanted a plan fast.²⁵ CENTCOM gave the mission to its Special Operations Command (SOCENT), who in turn directed the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) to establish a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF).²⁶ 5th SFG's mission was to conduct unconventional warfare (UW) to overthrow the Taliban and destroy al-Qaeda forces.²⁷ The UW campaign waged in Afghanistan would involve many elements of Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF). This chapter will focus on the Green Berets of the 5th Special Forces Group and the unconventional war they waged using surrogate forces.

²² Franks, 271.

²³ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 75.

²⁴ General Tommy Franks, "Campaign Against Terror," interview with *FRONTLINE*, 2002.

²⁵ Woodward, 43.

²⁶ Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: ARSO in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 370.

²⁷ Ibid.

STANDING UP A JSOTF

Within two days of 9/11, the 5th Special Forces Group was directed to form Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSOTF-N).²⁸ The 5th SFG immediately began preparations for deployment and on 10 October 2001, less than a month after 9/11, the 5th SFG main body arrived at Karshi Kanabad (K2), an old Soviet airbase in Uzbekistan. The 5th SFG was preceded by elements of the U.S. Air Force's 16th Special Operations Wing (SOW). The 16th SOW had already established a JSOTF headquarters to plan and command and control Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) operations in support of the air campaign. Upon arrival, COL Mulholland, the 5th SFG commander, assumed command of the JSOTF and the 16th SOW commander became the deputy JSOTF commander. The JSOTF was renamed "Task Force Dagger," which henceforth will be used to refer to JSOTF-North.

Special Forces Groups normally command and control their forces through a network of operational bases.²⁹ When a Special Forces Group establishes a Special Forces Operational Base (SFOB), they are purely organic. A Special Forces Group may also serve as an Army Special Operations Task Force (ARSOTF), where they direct and support only the Army Special Operations Forces assigned to a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF). When properly augmented, a Special Forces Group may also serve as the nucleus for a JSOTF.³⁰ To help 5th SFG stand up as a JSOTF, the Special Operations Command Joint Forces Command (SOCJFCOM) provided personnel to augment the Group staff, including the key positions of J2, J3, J4, J5, and assistant J6.³¹

Task Force Dagger was composed of many units. The following Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) made up the task force: the 5th Special Forces Group, elements of the 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, the 112th Signal Battalion, the 160th Special

²⁸ COL John Mulholland, "Campaign Against Terror," interview with *FRONTLINE*, 2002.

²⁹ Department of the Army, FM 3-05.20, 4-4.

³⁰ Ibid.

Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), the 4th Psychological Operations Group, and the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion.³² The task force was also composed of the following Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) units: the 16th Special Operations Wing (SOW), the 9th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), and special tactics squadron (STS) teams from the 23rd STS. Finally, the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, provided base security at K2. Despite the growing pains of standing up a JSOTF, Task Force Dagger successfully infiltrated two Special Forces Operational Detachments into northern Afghanistan within two weeks of arriving at K2.

INITIAL PLANNING

SOCSENT, with staff augmentation from the United States Army Special Forces Command (USASFC), took the lead on planning the UW campaign for Afghanistan. Using the seven classic phases of UW (Fig. 1) as a foundation, planners envisioned that SF would link-up with Northern Alliance forces, organize and train them through the winter, and begin combat operations in the spring. Planners felt it would take months for the UW campaign to mature. Moreover, the UW campaign was viewed as a supporting effort to the decisive combat operations that would occur later with the introduction of conventional Coalition ground forces. No one envisioned that the air campaign, in conjunction with a UW campaign, would achieve decisive victory over the Taliban. The “light speed” UW that occurred required Task Force Dagger to remain flexible and adaptive.³³

³¹ Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *ARSOF in Afghanistan*, 57.

³² Ibid., 45.

³³ BG Kenneth Bergquist, *Unconventional Warfare in Afghanistan*, Joint Special Operations University Brief to CGSC, 24 April 2003.

THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE

The Northern Alliance was an anti-Taliban opposition group consisting of a loose conglomeration of several different ethnic tribes that included the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and the Hazaras. The southern Pashtun tribes, which represent the majority ethnic group in Afghanistan, were not a part of the Northern Alliance, but they also were opposed to the Taliban regime. The two indigenous leaders the 5th SFG had identified as potential partners in their UW campaign were Mohammed Fahim Khan and General Rashid Dostum. Khan had succeeded Ahmad Shah Massoud, as the senior military leader of the Northern Alliance. Massoud, known as the “Lion of Panjshir”, had led the mujahideen fight against the Soviet Union. He was assassinated just two days prior to 9/11. General Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek, had served in the Soviet army and fought against the mujahideen until he switched sides and joined Massoud to fight against the communist puppet regime in Afghanistan. Dostum had formed his own militia, which was approximately 10,000 to 15,000 strong.

Many Northern Alliance members got their start as mujahideen fighting against the Soviets. During the Soviet’s ten-year occupation, the mujahideen ran an effective insurgency, but the Soviets adapted to the situation by effectively using air power to fight the insurgents. In the mid-eighties, however, the mujahideen regained the advantage when the CIA provided them with Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, effectively neutralizing Soviet air power.³⁴ The lesson learned from the Soviet’s experience in Afghanistan was that large conventional forces are ineffective in restrictive terrain against a determined enemy.

INFILTRATION AND LINK-UP

On 20 October 2001, after several aborted attempts to infiltrate Operational Detachments-Alpha (ODA) into Afghanistan, the first two teams were successfully inserted into Afghanistan.

³⁴ Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *ARSOF in Afghanistan*, 13.

The 12-man teams were sent to make contact with Fahim Khan and General Dostum. After successfully linking up with their respective warlords they quickly established rapport. Within 24 hours, at the request of their warlords, both ODAs, with their attached Air Force Special Tactics teams, found themselves directing air strikes on Taliban frontline positions. These air strikes impressed the Northern Alliance and further strengthened rapport with the teams.³⁵

Initial assessment of the factions revealed they were ready and willing to begin combat operations. However, the unconventional warfare campaign plan that SOCCENT envisioned did not involve immediate combat operations. The ODAs discovered that the classic approach to conducting unconventional warfare would not work in Afghanistan. Like Lawrence with his Bedouin tribesmen in Arabia, SF in Afghanistan had to adapt their strategy to the people with whom they were working. In keeping with Sun Tzu's maxim of knowing when one can fight and when one cannot, the SF ODAs were not intimidated by this change in plans. They knew the necessary air assets were in place and were able to begin conducting combat operations immediately. Had the air assets not been in place, they would not have been able to achieve overmatching firepower and would not have been able to proceed as they did.

The Northern Alliance commanders took great care to protect their new American friends. For example, General Dostum had his personal bodyguards surround the SF team and initially did not let them get any closer than eight kilometers to the fight.³⁶ Dostum was well aware of American intolerance for casualties and he was not going to risk America pulling out of Afghanistan because U.S. Special Forces soldiers were killed.³⁷

During their first two weeks on the ground the ODAs learned how to effectively support their assigned surrogate forces. They discovered that by splitting the 12-man SF detachment, often into three-man elements, they could cover a broader front and better track the positions of

³⁵ Kaleve I. Sepp, "Meeting the 'G-Chief': ODA 595" *Special Warfare* (September 2002), 12.

³⁶ Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *ARSOF in Afghanistan*, 126.

³⁷ Sepp, 12.

the Northern Alliance Forces. This tactic proved valuable in preventing fratricide. It also facilitated synchronization of operations because the Northern Alliance lacked the means to effectively communicate among units. Because each element of the SF team had communications equipment, they were able to compensate for the Afghans' shortfall. The SF teams were also able to bring in critical supplies such as horse feed, blankets, and cold weather equipment. Eventually, with the assistance of the CIA, the teams received the weapons and ammunition the surrogate forces needed to wage a sustained campaign against the Taliban.

MAZAR-E SHARIF

Mazar-e Sharif, the second largest city in Afghanistan, was of significant cultural, religious and economic value to the Northern Alliance. The U.S. was also interested in Mazar-e Sharif, because of the airfields located there. If captured, the airfields would provide a critical airhead to bring in additional U.S. troops and supplies.³⁸ In 1998 the Northern Alliance had been pushed out of Mazar-e Sharif by the Taliban and forced into the mountains. Now the Northern Alliance had American Special Forces and U.S. air power to assist them. In preparation for major offensive operations, Task Force Dagger infiltrated elements of ODC 53, the equivalent of a battalion command post, on 2 November 2001, to provide high-level liaison with General Dostum and the other faction leaders.³⁹ On 4 November 2001 Task Force Dagger infiltrated another ODA to assist General Mohammed Atta and his faction.

The plan to liberate Mazar-e Sharif consisted of concurrent attacks by different factions through the two river valleys to the south of the city. The factions would link up and combine their forces where the two rivers joined and then together would make a final push to Mazar-e Sharif. On 5 November 2001 they began the offensive. To facilitate command and control and fire support, the ODAs split their teams to provide coverage across the Northern Alliance front.

³⁸ CPT Mark, "Campaign Against Terror," interview with *FRONTLINE*, 2002.

As the Northern Alliance advanced, SF and STS continued to call in air strikes against the Taliban defenders in the river valley. The Taliban proved not be very prudent by maintaining the integrity of their formations. This made them easier targets for coalition air strikes. Had they dispersed and reverted to guerilla warfare tactics they may have sustained less damage and prolonged the war.

While the SF teams were directing precision air strikes to reduce Taliban defensive positions, the Northern Alliance commanders were negotiating with Taliban commanders. This is a common practice in Afghanistan, where it is customary to switch sides and change allegiances. While some Taliban commanders took up the offer, others were determined to resist at all costs. Many of these die-hard fighters were foreigners and had ties to al-Qaeda. These non-Afghan forces tended to be better trained and equipped, and they fought the hardest against the Northern Alliance.

After several days of fighting, the Northern Alliance had pushed the Taliban out of the river valleys. The Taliban were now consolidating and reorganizing in defensive positions in the Tangi Gap, the only defensible terrain between the Northern Alliance and Mazar-e Sharif. As SF continued to direct air strikes against the Taliban, the Northern Alliance forces massed and then launched an overwhelming assault on the gap, completely routing the enemy. The offensive maneuver consisted of Northern Alliance forces charging in on horseback while others moved in on foot or by truck, all the while being supported by precision-guided bombs dropped from coalition aircraft under the control of Special Forces. As the Taliban retreated, coalition air power continued to interdict the fleeing forces. The way to Mazar-e Sharif was now open and the SF and the Northern Alliance flowed into the city where they were met by celebrating crowds.

The liberation of Mazar-e Sharif on 10 November 2001, represented the first major victory for the Northern Alliance and their SF advisors and was significant in a number of ways.

³⁹ 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group, "The Liberation of Mazar-e Sharif: 5th SF Group

First, it significantly boosted the confidence of the Northern Alliance forces. Second, it started the collapse of the Taliban, not only in the north, but also throughout the country.⁴⁰ Third, it indicated the speed with which the UW campaign could be fought as evidenced by the fact that it was only three weeks from the time the first ODAs infiltrated until Mazar-e Sharif was liberated. Finally, it demonstrated that Special Forces could bring together multiple factions under one formation and coordinate a major offensive with surrogate Afghan forces.⁴¹

ANALYSIS

The first criterion that will be used to analyze this vignette is training, focusing on several aspects of cultural awareness and regional expertise, which is essential to conducting surrogate warfare. One of the most important aspects of cultural awareness and regional expertise is language skills. All Special Forces soldiers maintain proficiency in a foreign language. To facilitate language proficiency SF Groups have language labs, which provide SF soldiers the necessary materials and instruction they need to maintain proficiency. Additionally, all SF soldiers are required to take the Defense Language Proficiency Test annually. However, because of the high operational tempo, most SF soldiers do not get very much time to dedicate to their language training, although once they deploy they get plenty of on the job training.

In an interview with *FRONTLINE*, COL Mulholland, the 5th Group Commander, stated he was concerned about his Group's "lack of precise cultural and tribal knowledge of Afghanistan."⁴² 5th SFG's language and cultural focus is on Arabic and the Middle East. The predominant languages in Afghanistan are Pashtun and Dari. Moreover, Afghanistan was a new area for the 5th SFG and consequently they did not have a lot of institutional knowledge of the

Conducts UW in Afghanistan," *Special Warfare* (June 2002), 36.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁴¹ Ibid., 36.

⁴² Mulholland, "Campaign Against Terror," interview with *FRONTLINE*, 2002.

country.⁴³ Special Forces Operational Detachments were forced to improvise. For example, the Detachment Commander for the team assigned to General Dostum, knew enough Russian that he could communicate on a very rudimentary basis until an Afghan translator was found who could speak better English than the commander's Russian.⁴⁴ The biggest limiting factor for language and cultural training is time. Because of the quick deployment to Afghanistan there was not sufficient time to gain proficiency in the languages of the region. Despite having limited language and cultural experience with Afghanistan, Special Forces teams were still very successful. The reason for this was they were able to adapt cultural skills and experience developed during other training missions to the Middle East to the situation in Afghanistan.

Task Force Dagger was also sensitive to the implications of cultural awareness. For example, the task force recognized that rivalries existed between the various factions and as more anti-Taliban groups were identified, the task force took care to ensure equitable distribution of ODAs among the various factions, thus preventing any perception of favoritism.⁴⁵ This is significant because it demonstrates an operational-level of cultural awareness on the part of Task Force Dagger. By knowing the enemy and knowing themselves as Sun Tzu once said, the task force was able to keep their ranks united in purpose.

The second criterion concerns the organization of a Special Forces Group and their ability to be an operational-level headquarters that plans, supports, and supervises the execution of a UW campaign. The problem was that 5th SFG was directed to establish a JSOTF, an operational-level joint headquarters, not a tactical-level Army SF Command or ARSOTF. They lacked the personnel, communications equipment, and training to run a joint headquarters. In addition to serving as a joint headquarters, the JSOTF was also responsible for the isolation,

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *ARSOF in Afghanistan*, 126.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 98.

infiltration, resupply, command, control and communications for their Special Forces Operational Detachments, a mission that would normally have gone to a separate ARSOTF or SFOB.⁴⁶

The lack of training and personnel would manifest itself in a number of ways during the early days of the JSOTF. For example, within a JSOTF there are many important tasks that must be performed in order to effectively support a UW campaign and the operational detachments. Fire support and air operations are among these. Just as T.E. Lawrence was able to effectively combine British motorized forces with Arab horsemen, the SF ODAs brought U.S. air power to bear on the Taliban. The SF ODAs depended upon air power to destroy Taliban forces and to establish credibility with the Northern Alliance. Also, like Detachment 101 in Burma, SF depended upon air operations to infiltrate and exfiltrate the operational area, as well as to logistically support themselves and the Northern Alliance. Therefore, at the operational level there was a need to be able to effectively plan fire support and air operations. Recognizing the importance of these two missions and the lack of expertise to perform them, COL Mulholland drew upon various units assigned to the JSOTF to form an ad hoc Joint Fires Element and eventually was able to get the Joint Special Operations Aviation Component (JSOAC) to co-locate with the JSOTF to plan all fixed and rotary wing operations.⁴⁷

Although the 5th Special Forces Group experienced initial growing pains, they proved to be an adaptive learning organization. According to Peter M. Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, “the organizations that will truly excel...will be organizations that tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization.”⁴⁸ Because of the maturity, professionalism and commitment of the soldiers in a Special Forces Group, they were able to adapt to a complex situation and achieve outstanding success.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁸ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: Task Force Viking - northern Iraq

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM saw many brave and bold actions enroute to toppling Saddam Hussein's regime, but perhaps none was more daring than that of Task Force Viking in northern Iraq. Here in the northern fifth of the country, a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) and 70,000 Kurdish Peshmerga took on 13 Iraqi divisions. Task Force Viking's mission was to conduct unconventional warfare and their key task was to disrupt Iraqi forces positioned along the Green Line, preventing them from going south where they could interfere with the conventional coalition assault on Baghdad. The motto of the task force, "Concede Nothing," captures the spirit in which they took on their mission. Not satisfied with just disrupting the Iraqi forces they faced, the task force took the fight to the enemy. When the dust settled, Task Force Viking had captured two of the largest cities in Iraq, secured key Iraqi oilfields and caused conventional Iraqi forces to either surrender or abandon their posts and melt away into the local population.

A FRIENDSHIP IS FORMED

The idea of conducting UW with the Kurds was not a new one. During the Persian Gulf War, Brigadier General Richard Potter, commander of Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR), deployed "pilot teams" to Turkey to assess the feasibility of organizing Kurds into resistance groups.⁴⁹ General Carl Stiner, the SOCOM commander at the time, proposed a UW plan to Generals Schwarzkopf and Powell that entailed attacking Saddam's rear with Kurdish and Shiite rebels organized by Special Forces.⁵⁰ According to Stiner, a UW campaign in Saddam's rear area would cause him to divert forces, thus preventing him from invading Saudi Arabia and possibly causing him to pull out of Kuwait.⁵¹ Unfortunately, Special Operations Forces in the

⁴⁹ Douglas C. Waller, *The Commandos: The Inside Story of America's Secret Soldiers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 233.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 232.

⁵¹ Ibid.

early 1990s were not viewed with the same enthusiasm they are today. As a result, Stiner's ideas were met with resistance. Meanwhile, BG Potter laid the groundwork with the Turks and CENTCOM for possibly organizing the Kurds and positioned half of the 10th SFG in Turkey under the pretense of conducting combat search and rescue operations.⁵² The Turks were very concerned about the prospect of the U.S. conducting UW in their backyard. Specifically, they were against arming and training the Kurds, which they feared would lead to the unification and establishment of an independent Kurdish state. This same issue would resurface in OIF when Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said that Kurdish control of Kirkuk and Mosul would be grounds for a Turkish invasion of northern Iraq.⁵³

The positive relationship between the Kurds and the 10th Special Forces Group was cemented a decade before OIF, when in early April 1991 the 1st Battalion, 10th SFG deployed to southeast Turkey and northern Iraq to provide humanitarian assistance to over a half a million Kurds. The humanitarian crisis was brought on when Saddam Hussein attacked the Kurds for rising up against his regime following operation DESERT STORM. The Kurds, who were no match for the Iraqi Army, fled to the mountains along the southeast border of Turkey where they suffered from freezing temperatures and starvation. Over the next few weeks both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 10th SFG also deployed to provide relief to the Kurds. This operation would mark the first time the Group would deploy as a whole. General Galvin, the commander of European Command (EUCOM), would remark, "The 10th Special Forces Group saved a half million Kurds from extinction."⁵⁴ The compassion 10th SFG showed the Kurds would not be forgotten, and in March 2003 the Kurds provided a warm reception when the 10th SFG returned.

⁵² Ibid., 235.

⁵³ Ken Dilanian, Kevin G. Hall and Mark Mc Donald, "As Turkey casts wary eye on Kurdish held territory, U.S. forces move into position for a fight with Iraqis," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, online at www.contracostatimes.com. Accessed on 19 July 2004.

⁵⁴ History of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), online at www.soc.mil. Accessed on 26 October 2004.

THE KURDS

The situation in northern Iraq had improved considerably since the Gulf War. Under the protection of Operation Northern Watch (ONW), the successor to Operation Provide Comfort II, the Kurds prospered. In 1998 the two main political parties, the KDP led by Massoud Barzani and the PUK led by Jalal Talabani, put aside their differences and agreed to share power. The KDP and PUK both possessed militias called the Peshmerga, which literally translated means "those who face death." Although the Peshmerga primarily had small arms, what they lacked in firepower they made up for in fierceness. By the time Task Force Viking arrived in March 2003, there would be approximately 70,000 Peshmerga available to form a surrogate army to execute the UW campaign in the north.⁵⁵

TASK FORCE VIKING

Task Force Viking was first formed on 26 July 2002 at Fort Carson, Colorado, home of the 10th Special Force Group (Airborne). The 10th SFG, commanded by Colonel Charles Cleveland, formed the nucleus of this Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF).⁵⁶ The task force was composed of many units. At its core was the Group Headquarters, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 10th Group, and the 3rd Battalion of the 3rd Special Forces Group. The task force also consisted of the following joint and coalition special operations units: the 404th Civil Affairs Battalion, D Company/96th Civil Affairs Battalion, Task Force 7 Special Boat Squadron from the United Kingdom, and the 352nd Special Operations Group (USAF) in direct support of the task force. The following conventional army and joint forces also contributed to Task Force Viking: the 2nd Battalion/14th Infantry from the 10th

⁵⁵ Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Now We Have America," *Newsweek* (7 April 2003), 35

⁵⁶ 10th Special Forces Group, *CJSOTF-N After Action Report* (Fort Carson, Colorado, June 2003)

Mountain Division, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and elements of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). At its peak Task Force Viking consisted of approximately 5,200 personnel.⁵⁷

PREPARATION FOR WAR

Task Force Viking planned to establish a base of operations in Turkey while the 4th Infantry Division was planning to offload from the Mediterranean, transit overland through Turkey and enter Iraq from the north. But, basing rights in Turkey did not seem promising. Nevertheless, General Franks kept negotiations open with Turkey pending a vote in its Parliament.⁵⁸ When it became official there would be no Turkish support, plans had to be changed. Because the 4th ID would not be entering Iraq from the north with its 60,000 troops, CENTCOM needed to do something to keep the 13 Iraqi divisions in place and prevent them from reinforcing Baghdad. Task Force Viking was ordered to open up a second front in northern Iraq.⁵⁹

The Joint Special Operations Area (JSOA) that Task Force Viking established in northern Iraq encompassed over 173,000 square kilometers and was bordered by Turkey to the north, Iran to the East, and to the south by a 350-kilometer de facto boundary called the Green Line, which separated Iraq proper from the Kurdish autonomous zone. The JSOA was further divided into two Special Operations Areas (SOA), which represented the approximate territorial boundaries for the KDP and PUK. Opposing the task force along the Green Line were three Iraqi corps, consisting of 13 Iraqi divisions. Two of these divisions were Republican Guard Divisions, two were mechanized, one was armor and eight were infantry divisions.⁶⁰ Also located in the north

⁵⁷ Charles Cleveland, *Global Scouts* (Briefing presented at the NDIA Symposium, 5 February 2004).

⁵⁸ Williamson Murray and Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr., *The Iraq War: A Military History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 186.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 299.

along the Iranian border was a 700-man terrorist organization called Ansar al-Islam, which was believed to have ties to al-Qaeda.

The campaign plan Task Force Viking developed involved assigning a Special Forces battalion to each of the major Kurdish factions, with a third Special Forces battalion available to conduct other special operations. The PUK and the KDP would serve as a surrogate army in place of the conventional U.S. forces originally planned for in the north. The campaign plan consisted of three lines of operations. The first line of operations was air interdiction in which targeting priorities were directed against the two Republican Guard divisions and one armored division, collectively comprising the Iraqi operational center of gravity. The second line of operation was ground operations in which key cities were defended, close air support (CAS) and terminal guidance operations (TGO) conducted, and dislocated civilians were managed. The third line of operation was information operations, which sought to support the deception plan, facilitate capitulation and cease fires, prevent movement of Iraqi forces south, and limit oil infrastructure damage. The end state was Iraqi operational mobility was disrupted and operational success was exploited.

INFILTRATING NORTHERN IRAQ

Turkey continued to confound the situation by refusing to allow the U.S. overflight rights. The initial infiltration into northern Iraq, dubbed "Ugly Baby," took a circuitous route from Constanta, Romania, over the Mediterranean Sea, down to Jordan, then across the western desert of Iraq just below the Syrian border into Bashur airfield. U.S. Air Force Special Tactics teams had already established airheads at Bashur airfield and As-Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq. On 22 March, the Special Operations Combat Talon MC-130's flew under Iraqi air defenses. Still, they came under heavy fire and several aircraft were damaged. One aircraft carrying an

entire SF company was severely damaged and was forced to conduct an emergency landing in Turkey.⁶¹ Turkey granted overflight rights the next day.

Task Force Viking continued to infiltrate their forces via their MC-130s. Because of the distance from Romania, restrictions imposed by the Turks, and the remaining air defense threat, only one infiltration per night was feasible. This required task force planners to modify the plan, balancing the infiltration of ODAs with supplies. Because of the limited lift capacity of the MC-130 and the lack of C-17 support, the build up of combat power occurred slower than desired. Despite these challenges, the task force's MC-130s performed admirably, successfully infiltrating all of Task Force Viking in a matter of weeks.

OPERATION VIKING HAMMER

The first order of business for Task Force Viking was to defeat Ansar al-Islam, camped in northeastern Iraq near the Iranian border. The Kurds had been battling Ansar al-Islam for several years prior to the arrival of the U.S. in March 2003. Ansar al-Islam's terror campaign against the Kurds escalated in December 2002 when two PUK outposts were overrun, the bodies of the soldiers mutilated, and videotapes of the heinous act distributed in Sulaymaniyah.⁶² It was believed that Ansar's terror camps were providing sanctuary to members of al-Qaeda, and the Kurds were adamant that Ansar be destroyed. Using the PUK Peshmerga as a surrogate force the 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group under the command of LTC Kenneth Tovo planned Operation VIKING HAMMER to destroy Ansar al-Islam.

Operation VIKING HAMMER commenced on 28 March and ended on 30 March 2003. The operation was an impressive display of U.S. firepower, which included strikes by Tomahawk missiles, B-52s, F-14s and F-18s. Perhaps the most impressive display came from the AC-130 gunships that were in direct support of the task force. Despite receiving anti-aircraft fire, they

⁶¹ 10th Special Forces Group, *CJSOTF-N After Action Report*.

loitered on target all night until they expended all their ammunition. The assault force consisted of approximately 7,000 Peshmerga and was conducted along several prongs with two SF soldiers per approximately 360 Peshmerga.⁶³ Like Task Force Dagger with the Northern Alliance, Task Force Viking also successfully combined U.S. air power with surrogate forces to accomplish both U.S. and surrogate objectives.

Operation Viking Hammer was a huge success and accomplished several important tasks. It demonstrated U.S. commitment to the Kurds, just as T.E. Lawrence and the British Expeditionary Force had done with the Arabs in 1918 and Task Force Dagger had done with the Northern Alliance in 2001. The Peshmerga also proved themselves to their SF advisors by continually advancing under heavy fire.⁶⁴ Routing Ansar al-Islam eliminated a significant rear area threat, which allowed Kurdish and U.S. forces to focus combat power against regular Iraqi forces positioned along the Green Line.⁶⁵ In the operation, Task Force Viking and their Kurdish surrogates seized over 300 square kilometers of terrain and killed over 300 Ansar al-Islam fighters. Only three Kurds were killed and 23 were wounded, with no American casualties.⁶⁶

ATTACKING THE GREEN LINE

With the Kurds fully on board, Task Force Viking turned south and commenced operations against Iraqi forces positioned along the Green Line. Operation MOUNTAIN THUNDER was planned to be a series of aggressive attacks utilizing all of the task force's U.S. and surrogate assets. In the southern portion of the JSOA, the 3rd Battalion, 10th Group with their PUK forces attacked to seize Chamchamal, pushing Iraqi forces to the outskirts of Kirkuk. In the center, the 3rd Battalion of the 3rd Special Forces Group, along with elements of the 2nd

⁶² Paul McEnroe, "Arrival of U.S. troops suggests a move soon in northern Iraq" *Star Tribune* (24 March 2003).

⁶³ Dehghanpisheh, 35.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 250.

Battalion, 10th Group and their Kurdish Peshmerga, attacked an armor brigade and defeated several counterattacks. In the north the 2nd Battalion with KDP Peshmerga attacked towards Mosul. All along the Green Line, Iraqi units remained dug in and presented themselves as lucrative targets to coalition airpower.

In response to Turkish demands that Kirkuk and Mosul not fall into Kurdish hands, the task force ordered their ODAs to only advance beyond the Green Line with a maximum of 150 Peshmerga fighters.⁶⁷ Because the ODAs depended upon their Kurdish surrogates as their only maneuver force, they had to use their interpersonal and cross cultural communications skills to bridge the gap between policy objectives and military reality. As Lawrence discovered with the Arabs, the key to conducting warfare with surrogates rests in the ability to strike a balance between the goals of the surrogates with those of the sponsor.

Once Iraqi Forces had retreated past Kirkuk, the relationship between the task force and the Kurds would once again be tested with the securing of the oil fields and the occupation of the city. Because of the political danger of Turkish intervention, the oil fields were initially secured with elements of the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Group and 2-14 Infantry. The U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade soon conducted a relief in place and assumed responsibility for securing the oil fields. After Kirkuk fell, SF ODAs began moving their Peshmerga forces back behind the Green Line and transitioned control of the city to the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Meanwhile the battle for Mosul raged on. SF with their Kurdish Peshmerga were taking and giving ground with Iraqi forces in a series of battles.⁶⁸ Whereas Kirkuk had a predominantly Kurdish population, Mosul was mostly Arab and strongly supported the Iraqi army. Resistance in the city was much more significant and the arrival of Kurdish Peshmerga only served to aggravate the situation. However, there was also a Kurdish population in the city and the Kurd's

⁶⁶ Robinson, 323.

⁶⁷ 10th Special Forces Group, *CJSOTF-N After Action Report*.

⁶⁸ Robinson, 328.

interest in reuniting with them was strong. The 2nd Battalion, 10th SFG, under the command of LTC Robert Waltemeyer, was in an awkward situation. While he needed the Kurds to fight the Iraqi forces, he did not want them advancing into Mosul, triggering a Turkish response. The 2nd Battalion would struggle to keep the Kurds out of the city. But, a city of two million people is impossible for an SF battalion to secure alone. In order to balance the competing national goals; Task Force Viking developed a plan to introduce the 26th MEU to secure the city and satisfy U.S., Kurdish, and Turkish interests. The 26th MEU would continue their efforts to secure Mosul until the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) arrived and assumed control of the city. Meanwhile the ODAs would continue to move their Peshmerga forces back behind the Green Line.

ANALYSIS

Applying the criterion of training, focusing specifically on cultural awareness and regional expertise, insight can be gained into how Task Force Viking successfully conducted surrogate warfare in northern Iraq. For Task Force Viking, the ability to rapidly gain the trust and confidence of the Kurdish Peshmerga proved vital to their success. Operation PROVIDE COMFORT had paved the way for a positive relationship with the Kurds. For example, the commanders of both 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 10th SFG, participated in PROVIDE COMFORT as detachment commanders.⁶⁹ This went a long way in giving them credibility with senior KDP and PUK leadership. This experience was not limited to the battalion commanders, as many of the senior NCOs and warrant officers on the ODAs had participated in PROVIDE COMFORT as junior NCOs. They also capitalized on this experience to establish rapport with the Peshmerga. This reinforces the value of employing SF in areas where they have previously operated. Institutional knowledge of the area of operations and interpersonal relationships formed during prior deployments allowed SF to quickly integrate and commence operations. This also suggests

⁶⁹ Ibid., 11.

that regional expertise and cultural awareness is not created overnight, but rather takes years build.

Like the 5th Special Forces Group in Afghanistan, 10th SFG faced challenges with language. Part of the reason for this is because 10th SFG's geographic area of responsibility is Europe, not the Middle East, and Arabic and Kurdish are not languages they typically focus on. Recognizing this shortcoming and learning from the challenges the 5th SFG faced in Afghanistan, 10th SFG incorporated language training as part of their pre-mission training for OIF. Because the 10th SFG had more time to prepare for operations in Iraq than 5th Group did for Afghanistan, their soldiers received accelerated language training in Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic from the Group Language Institute (GLI). Although they learned only enough language to be able to survive and communicate on a very primitive basis, even rudimentary language skills went a long way towards building rapport and establishing credibility with their Kurdish hosts.

In addition to receiving language training, 10th SFG soldiers also received cultural awareness training. Professors from the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), located at Hurlburt Air Force Base in Florida, traveled to Fort Carson and conducted a series of cultural awareness seminars over a three-day period.⁷⁰ With respect to Muslim culture, 10th SFG soldiers already had a wealth of experience to draw upon from operations conducted in Bosnia and Kosovo. This is significant because it demonstrates that the cultural skills and experience developed over years of deployments are easily transferable to other regions and cultures.

At the operational level, Task Force Viking planners were also cognizant of the importance of cultural awareness. They recognized the volatile dynamic that existed between the Turks, Kurds and Iraqi Arabs. The task force maintained peace between the three ethnic groups by controlling the actions of the Kurds. They did this by limiting the number of Kurds that crossed the Green Line by directing each ODA to only take 150 Kurdish fighters with them. As

⁷⁰ 3rd Battalion, 10th SFG, *After Action Report*, (Fort Carson, Colorado, June 2003).

soon as Kirkuk and Mosul were liberated, Task Force Viking directed the ODAs to remove their Peshmerga from the two cities and back behind the Green Line. This was not always easy because tension existed between the different Kurdish factions. However, through interpersonal skills SF was able to maintain balance between the groups and leverage their surrogates to accomplish the mission. The following example illustrates this.

During a meeting between the task force commander, his battalion commanders and the KDP and PUK leadership, the PUK contingent began celebrating about the fall of Kirkuk. The KDP leader, Barzani, left the meeting in anger.⁷¹ The KDP were concerned about the PUK making a grab for Kirkuk, a city both factions wanted. In response to this, the task force commander gathered up the PUK and KDP leaders and retired them to a private room, away from their lieutenants, where he proceeded to lay out the campaign plan. He explained to them how they each were contributing to the campaign and that if either of them wished to have a role in a post-Saddam Iraq, then they had better watch how they conducted themselves. By taking the time to explain the significance of the campaign in the north, the task force commander was able to defuse the situation while at the same time enrolling them into his vision for the conduct of the campaign.

The second criterion has to do with the organization of the Special Forces Group and their ability to serve as an operational-level headquarters that can plan, support and execute a UW campaign. Like the 5th SFG the 10th SFG was directed to form a JSOTF, an operational-level joint headquarters, not a tactical level SFOB or ARSOTF. Although they initially lacked the personnel, communications equipment, and training to run a joint headquarters, the biggest difference between the experience of 10th SFG and 5th SFG was time.

Task Force Viking had significantly more time to prepare to become a JSOTF. They not only had the benefit of the lessons learned by 5th SFG in Afghanistan, they also had the

⁷¹ Robinson, 332.

opportunity to rehearse as a JSOTF. For example, in December 2002, Task Force Viking participated in CENTCOM's INTERNAL LOOK exercise, which focused on joint and coalition operations in support of the Operation Iraqi Freedom campaign plan.⁷² This was essentially a dress rehearsal for the war and although there were many growing pains and mistakes made, the experience proved invaluable in helping Task Force Viking function as a JSOTF.

Because of the recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq there is now a wealth of institutional knowledge in the Special Forces Group with respect to running a JSOTF. Additionally, much of the necessary equipment required to run a JSOTF has been acquired. However, a SFG still only forms the nucleus of a JSOTF and as such the SFG staff needs time to bring all of the other joint and combined participants together to train prior to deploying.

Another operational-level issue Task Force Viking faced was logistics. Because of a lack of strategic airlift, Task Force Viking was forced to rely solely on their MC-130s for infiltrating personnel and supplies. As Task Force Viking built combat power in northern Iraq, they had to constantly balance what supplies were pushed forward. For example, initial heavy fighting along the Green Line required the task force to push forward more .50 caliber ammunition and Javelin anti-tank missiles at the expense of food, water and other requirements. To help alleviate the logistical strain, the task force relied on the Kurds for much of their initial logistical requirements. The Kurds were very helpful in providing everything from lodging, sustenance, and vehicles. In this regard, the Kurds proved to be more than just good fighters, but gracious hosts who provided critical life support to the task force as they built up combat power during the early days of the war.

⁷² Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, 54.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and Recommendations

U.S. Army Special Forces have played a critical role in prosecuting the Global War on Terror. Their ability to wage unconventional war remains their trademark. Operations in Afghanistan and northern Iraq demonstrated SF's ability to successfully leverage a surrogate force to achieve U.S. objectives. These UW campaigns were unique and suggest what future operations in the Global War on Terror may look like.

Although the use of surrogates in Afghanistan and northern Iraq was unique in many ways, the concept of using surrogates is not new. Chapter Two examined history, theory and doctrine in arriving at an understanding of surrogate warfare. The U.S. Army has a long history of using surrogates to achieve their objectives. Indian scouts were used to defeat renegade Indian tribes on the frontier. Indians provided the U.S. Army knowledge of the terrain, culture, and valuable human intelligence. During World War Two, Detachment 101 organized and trained Kachin tribesmen to fight the Japanese in China and Burma. They functioned as a surrogate army, performing a valuable economy of force mission in support of the Allies in the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations.

Chapter Two also examined the theories of Sun Tzu and T.E. Lawrence. Sun Tzu's maxim of know your enemy and know yourself offers valuable insight to understanding surrogate warfare. Whether working with a large force like the Kurdish Peshmerga or a smaller force like the Northern Alliance, Special Forces must understand the capabilities of their surrogate force and employ them accordingly. Special Forces must also maintain unity of effort by dealing with their surrogates fairly and by communicating openly with them about their expectations and the role they play in achieving broader objectives.

T.E. Lawrence's theory of unconventional warfare further emphasizes the importance of understanding the culture of the indigenous force with which one works. His understanding of the importance of family in Arab culture, for example, led him to develop a theory of fighting a

war of detachment. His theory stressed maintaining offensive initiative and avoiding the defense. Both the Northern Alliance and Kurdish Peshmerga faced a numerically superior force, yet they took the fight to the enemy. With the help of SF and coalition air power they were able to maintain offensive initiative and ultimately defeated Taliban and conventional Iraqi forces.

An examination of current Joint and Army doctrine reveals that surrogate warfare is not addressed as a distinct form of warfare. However, under the umbrella of unconventional warfare, which encompasses many different types of operations to include guerilla warfare, surrogate warfare fits. Clearly, the UW operations conducted in Afghanistan and Iraq were unique and represent a distinct departure from the model of guerilla warfare put forth in current doctrine. It is in this context that surrogate warfare emerges as a unique form of unconventional warfare.

This monograph presented two historical vignettes of UW operations conducted in Afghanistan and Iraq. Chapter Three examined U.S. Army Special Forces in Afghanistan and the role they played in leveraging the Northern Alliance as a surrogate army. The unconventional warfare campaign that Task Force Dagger waged was unique in many ways. The pace of UW operations was faster than anyone anticipated. Within 24 hours of linking up with Northern Alliance factions, Special Forces Operational Detachments were calling in air strikes against the Taliban. Within three weeks the first major combat operation began to liberate Mazar e-Sharif. The UW experience in Afghanistan did not follow the "classic" seven phases of UW described in current doctrine. SF essentially went straight into the combat employment phase and advised their surrogate force in the conduct of conventional type operations.

Chapter Four examined Task Force Viking and the UW operations they conducted with the Kurds in northern Iraq. Together with 70,000 Kurdish Peshmerga, SF led the way in disrupting 13 Iraqi divisions along the Green Line. Although the 10th Special Forces Group's focus is on the European Command Area of Responsibility, they successfully adapted to the CENTCOM AOR. Operation PROVIDE COMFORT proved invaluable in helping to make this

transition. Many 10th SFG soldiers, to include two of the battalion commanders, were veterans of Operation Provide Comfort, giving them instant credibility with their Kurdish counterparts.

The primary research question of this monograph was what does SF need to do to prepare for surrogate warfare in the future? The criterion of training, specifically cultural awareness and regional expertise, was used to analyze SF's experience in Afghanistan and Iraq. Analysis revealed that while SF were successful in applying cross-cultural skills developed over years of deployments, they still had challenges. Although SF conducted "crash course" language training in preparation for their UW operations, they still had to improvise to overcome language barriers by utilizing other non-native language skills until translators could be found. Based on this, the following conclusion is drawn. Although SF is capable of transferring cross-cultural and language skills, this is not sufficient for future UW operations. Too often, SF relies on translators and rudimentary communications in third languages as a workaround. Investment needs to be made to increase SF's language capability. Four to six months of initial language training is insufficient. Selected NCOs and officers should be sent for more comprehensive language training. Additionally, all SF soldiers should conduct immersion training to fully develop their language and cultural awareness skills. Finally, analysis of future threats should dictate what languages and cultures to invest in, rather than cycling SF soldiers through a group of core languages.

The second criterion, organization, was used to assess the ability of a Special Forces Group to function as an operational-level joint headquarters. Analysis of the experience of the 5th and 10th Special Forces Groups revealed that while they successfully accomplished their missions and established Joint Special Operations Task Forces, there were significant growing pains. The primary reasons for this were a lack of equipment, personnel and training. Much of the required equipment has now been acquired and there is increased institutional knowledge within the Special Forces Groups with respect to operating a JSOTF. However, there will always

be a requirement to bring the army, joint and combined personnel together in a timely manner to train as JSOTF prior to deploying.

The unconventional warfare campaigns SF waged in Afghanistan and Iraq were unique and established a trademark for UW operations in the 21st Century. Because of the cultural divide that currently exist between eastern and western cultures, the use of surrogates abroad may become increasingly more attractive. U.S. Army Special Forces are clearly the force of choice to leverage surrogates to achieve U.S. objectives. In order to prepare for future surrogate warfare SF must increase their cultural and regional expertise. SF must also be better able to function as an operational-level joint headquarters that can plan and support a UW campaign.

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